

U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Uncompahgre Field Office
2505 South Townsend
Montrose, CO 81401

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

NUMBER: CO-150-2006-0044 EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER (optional):

PROJECT NAME: Communication Site Management Plan for Gobbler's Knob
Communication Site.

PLANNING UNIT (optional): San Juan/San Miguel Resource Management Plan (RMP)

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

New Mexico Principal Meridian
T. 46 N., R. 17 W.,
Sec. 12: within NW¼.

APPLICANT: Bureau of Land Management, Uncompahgre Field Office

ISSUES AND CONCERNS (optional):

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

Background/Introduction (optional):

Proposed Action: The proposed action is to prepare and approve a Communication Site Management Plan for the Gobbler's Knob Communication Site. This plan outlines the specific communication uses at this location. This plan will be used by BLM officials administering communications uses at Gobbler's Knob, existing lessees, holders, and applicants desiring a lease, grant, or an amendment to an existing lease or right-of-way (ROW) grant. The Gobbler's Knob Communication Site Management Plan provides applicable guidance and adds current policy and technical standards for better management of the Gobbler's Knob Communications Site. The plan governs development and management of Gobbler's Knob and will be modified in the future as needs and conditions warrant. Any additional development of the site will be addressed in a site-specific NEPA document.

The BLM manual, H-2860-1, Communication Site Right-of-Way Handbook (Rel. 2-268, dated 3/29/90) states that "mixed low power (less than 1000 watts ERP) and high power (1000 watts ERP and greater) use of a site often creates severe interference problems for low power users, and generally is advisable to separate the two types of uses". The existing uses at Gobbler's

Knob are all less than 1000 watts ERP. Future and existing uses at Gobbler's Knob will be limited to less than 1000 watts ERP in order to attempt to maintain site integrity for existing users.

From the proposed plan, the maximum tower height for this site is 60 feet. All new towers will be self supporting. No new guy lines are permitted. Microwave (dish) antennas (other than ground mounted satellite dishes) will be limited to a maximum of six (6) feet in diameter. The smallest diameter dish that is technically feasible is the preferred.

Some of the site users have been maintaining the secondary road from County Road EE22 to the communication site. The new communication site lease recently granted to the County of Montrose included this segment of road. No other ROW holders at this site have this road included in their authorization. Once each ROW grant or communication site lease is amended to incorporate this plan, the plan would make the operation and maintenance of the access road from County Road EE22 to the communication site the responsibility of each right-of-way or lease holder. Once a Site User's Association is established, they should direct the operation and maintenance of this road.

No Action Alternative: The No Action alternative would consist of not preparing, approving, or implementing a comprehensive site plan for this communication site.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT NOT CARRIED FORWARD: No other alternatives are being considered.

NEED FOR THE ACTION: Overall management direction for the administration of communications sites is outlined in the CFR and the BLM Handbook and applicable BLM Instructional Memoranda. Specific direction for site management planning on designated communications sites is contained in BLM Handbook 2860-1. Primary regulations and policy pertaining to issuance of communication site authorizations by the BLM are found in Title 43 CFR Sections 2801- 2806 and BLM Handbook 2860-1.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3) the following plan:

Name of Plan: San Juan/San Miguel RMP

Date Approved: September 1985

Decision Number/Page: Management Unit A – Emphasis on Livestock Management

Decision Language: “Allow land actions where there is a clear and significant need and will result in minimal adverse impacts.” (Pages 22-28) The proposed action is in conformance with the plan.

Standards for Public Land Health: In January 1997, Colorado Bureau of Land Management (BLM) approved the Standards for Public Land Health. These standards cover upland soils, riparian systems, plant and animal communities, threatened and endangered species, and water

quality. Standards describe conditions needed to sustain public land health and relate to all uses of the public lands. Because a standard exists for these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in specific elements listed below:

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES / MITIGATION MEASURES:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

AIR QUALITY

Affected Environment: Air quality in the project area is good.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: Construction equipment would include typical road construction equipment and pickup trucks for the crew. There will be equipment noise and emissions during the maintenance operations. Overall, impacts are anticipated to be minimal for the long term operation and maintenance of the site and road.

AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Affected Environment: There are no areas of critical environmental concern in the project area.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: No impacts.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Affected Environment: The subject public lands have been previously inventoried. No cultural resources were found.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: There are no known impacts to cultural resources.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Affected Environment: The project area is located in a rural area.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: There will be no additional impacts to minority populations.

FARMLANDS, PRIME AND UNIQUE

Affected Environment: There are no prime and unique farmlands in the project area.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: There will be no impacts to this element.

FLOODPLAINS

Affected Environment: The project area is not in any floodplain.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: There will be no impacts to this element.

INVASIVE, NON-NATIVE SPECIES

Affected Environment: This area contains few weedy species. Portions of the site show evidence of previous disturbance, but current disturbance levels appear to be fairly low.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: Weeds may become established on the communication site or road due to the maintenance activities. All existing and new authorizations would be made subject to the plan which requires the holders to control noxious weeds. The holders will be required to provide a Pesticide Use Proposal for BLM approval prior to treatment.

Mitigation: The holders will be required to treat for weeds as determined necessary by the BLM.

MIGRATORY BIRDS

Affected Environment: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service publishes a list of Birds of Conservation Concern for the Southern Rockies Ecosystem. From that list the following species have the potential to occur at some time in the year on the project site.

Peregrine Falcon, (A pure cliff nester, mostly associated with PJ and Ponderosa)

Prairie Falcon (Also a pure cliff nester, in open country below 10,000 ft).

Golden Eagle (Nests in both trees and on cliffs, in most habitat types in W. CO)

Pinon Jay (may nest and forage in the scattered PJ around the com. Site.)

Virginia's warbler(PJ and Ponderosa Pine)

Of the above species, suitable cliff nesting sites for the raptors are present in the cliff faces below the project site. The prairie falcon, peregrine falcon, and golden eagle are known nesters on the cliff faces along the northern slopes of Paradox Valley. Other migratory bird species utilize the project area, and surrounding habitats for nesting, but no data is available on local populations.

During the field examination of this site none of the above species were observed. The highest priority area for migratory birds in the vicinity of the project site would be the cliff faces. During field examination of the site in March of 2006, there was no substantial non-game bird activity within the project location. No raptor nests were observed on the cliffs immediately below the communication site. No evidence of any raptor collision mortality was observed around any of the existing tower structures. No evidence of regular roosting was evident below the structures.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: Some disturbance of nesting migratory birds is possible during maintenance activities. The net change in available habitat would be negligible. Although the future development at the site may result in an incremental increase in available habitat for migratory species in the area, it is unlikely to result in a detectable change in the local populations. The proposed action will not result in a take of migratory birds, or violation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS

Affected Environment: A cultural resource record review was completed for the proposed action.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: No cultural resources or Native American religious concern items or areas were found. There will be no known impacts to Native American religious concerns.

THREATENED, ENDANGERED, AND SENSITIVE SPECIES (includes a finding on Standard 4)

Affected Environment: For a complete list of Endangered, Threatened, and Candidate species likely to occur within the Uncompahgre field office area, consult the field office 6840 file. Of the species on that list, the bald eagle, and, peregrine falcon (a species of special concern) are the only species likely to occur in the area. No water depletions are proposed as part of this proposed action, which could impact endangered fish downstream of this point. There are no critical habitats on the project site or adjacent to it that could be impacted by the proposed action.

A review of those species protected under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), or candidates for listing under that Act, was conducted. The site was also examined by a BLM biologist on 3/22/2006.

Wintering bald eagles utilize essentially all of the available habitats in the watershed for foraging at some time during the winter months. This site is not a prime location for foraging or other essential habitats, such as communal roosts, nests, or winter concentrations. No evidence of collision mortality of eagles or other large bird species were found during field examinations of the location.

Peregrine falcons, a species of special concern, are known to nest in Paradox Valley and the Dolores River Canyon. There are no known nest sites within several miles of this site. The site is within the hunting range of several aerie locations, but due to the character of the habitats around the project site, there is no attractive hunting habitat for peregrine falcons species.

The only BLM sensitive species likely on the proposed alignment are the five bats (Yuma myotis, spotted bat, Townsend's big eared bat, fringed myotis, and big free-tailed bat), midget faded rattlesnake, San Rafael milkvetch, and Naturita milkvetch. The five bat species may use the area for foraging habitat and may roost in the surrounding cliffs. During examination of the site on March of 2006, there was no evidence of any bat

collision mortality observed around any of the existing tower structures. San Rafael milkvetch was not found on site. There is a documented population of the Naturita milkvetch within 1.25 miles of this communication site on essentially the same geologic structures, however the species was not located on this site.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: There would be “No Effect” on any designated Critical Habitat. There would be “No Effect” on wintering bald eagles, peregrine falcons, or the Endangered Colorado River fish. There would be no effect to any species considered to be a candidate or proposed for listing under the ESA. The proposed action is not likely to have any impact on the BLM sensitive bat or plant species. Midget faded rattlesnakes, whether still in hibernation or active above ground could suffer some direct mortality from equipment, and soil and rock movement. Once maintenance is completed each year, rattlesnakes are likely to move back into the area. It is unlikely that any mortality caused by the proposed action would be detectible in the population of this species in the lower San Miguel River watershed.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Threatened & Endangered species: There are no impacts anticipated to T&E species.

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID

Affected Environment: The communication site plan includes guidance on the use and/or storage of hazardous wastes at the communication site. The plan does not authorize any new use and/or storage of hazardous wastes. Any additional development of the site will be addressed in a site-specific NEPA document.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: No impacts from the use and/or storage of hazardous or solid wastes are anticipated from implementation of the proposed action.

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND GROUND (includes a finding on Standard 5)

Affected Environment: No surface or ground water is present within site.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: There are no impacts to surface or ground water anticipated from the proposed action.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for water quality: The proposed action should not result in long term impacts to water quality.

WETLANDS & RIPARIAN ZONES (includes a finding on Standard 2)

Affected Environment: There are no wetlands within the site.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for riparian systems: The proposed action should not result in any impacts to these resources.

WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS

Affected Environment: There are no wild or scenic rivers in the communication site area.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: There will be no impacts to these resources.

WILDERNESS

Affected Environment: The communication site is not within a wilderness area.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: There will be no impacts to wilderness from the proposed action.

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

The following elements **must** be addressed due to the involvement of Standards for Public Land Health:

SOILS (includes a finding on Standard 1)

Affected Environment: The proposed action does not include the disturbance of any additional soils.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: There are no impacts to soils anticipated.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for upland soils: The proposed action will not result in any new impacts to soils.

VEGETATION (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: Vegetation in the area is generally sparse. Based on the field survey, the sites have a general aspect of a pinon/juniper community. Other species seen on the February 28, 2006 field survey include black sagebrush, Geyer's sedge, Indian ricegrass, galleta grass, salina wildrye, mock goldenweed, grassy rockgoldenrod, snakeweed, needle and thread grass, and scorpion weed. Additionally, there are scattered ponderosa pines in the project area. The ponderosa pines are an anomaly that is present on the site due to the accumulation of moisture in the cracks of the exposed bedrock. Invasive weeds are limited to cheat grass. Due to the thin soils on the site, and previous disturbance, plant cover is not dense.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: Vegetation at the communication site would remain as is. Due to the thin soils and drought prone conditions due to high winds present on the site, successful seeding bare areas is highly unlikely. The spread of cheat grass is also unlikely.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Wildlife, Aquatic and Wildlife, Terrestrial): There are no impacts anticipated to the plant communities. The existing impacts on plant communities are likely to be evident for an extended time period; however, the small size of the communication site is unlikely to have a detectable impact on the health of plant communities on the public land.

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: There is no aquatic habitat water in the project area.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Terrestrial): There are no impacts on the health of animal communities.

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL (includes a finding on Standard 3)

Affected Environment: The project area is not considered high quality habitat. Most of the species present are likely to be small mammals, herpetiles, and non-game birds. No evidence of big game use was observed during site visits, but CDOW maps the area as winter range for mule deer and elk. CDOW also classifies the site as severe winter range for both species. There are no habitats that could be classified as essential or unique for any local wildlife species.

Environmental Consequences/Mitigation: During maintenance activities more mobile wildlife would be displaced from the immediate vicinity. Shortly after completion many of the resident wildlife species would reoccupy the sites. Due to the previous disturbances of available habitats, and sparse vegetation, detrimental effects on resident wildlife are likely to be undetectable.

Mitigation: None.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for plant and animal communities (partial, see also Vegetation and Wildlife, Aquatic): There may be some short term minor impacts to wildlife during maintenance activities. It is not likely to result in a detectable negative effect on public land health.

OTHER NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS: For the following elements, those brought forward for analysis will be formatted as shown above.

Non-Critical Element	NA or Not Present	Applicable or Present, No Impact	Applicable & Present and Brought Forward for Analysis
Access	X		
Cadastral Survey	X		

Fire	X		
Forest Management	X		
Geology and Minerals	X		
Hydrology/Water Rights	X		
Law Enforcement	X		
Paleontology	X		
Noise	X		
Range Management	X		
Realty Authorizations	X		
Recreation	X		
Socio-Economics	X		
Transportation	X		
Visual Resources	X		

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY: The proposed action will result in long term encumbrances and uses on the public land.

PERSONS / AGENCIES CONSULTED:

Jim Scheodler, Rocky Mountain Public Broadcasting
Jim Frank, CCR Montrose III, LLC
Philip Mowbray, Haok Media
Paul Redd, Redd Ranches
Kent Tomlinson, Nucla-Naturita Telephone Company
Mark Young, agent for the County of Montrose

INTERDISCIPLINARY REVIEW:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Area of Responsibility</u>
Karen Montgomery	Realty Specialist	Lands & Realty
Jim Ferguson	Biologist	Wildlife, T&E
Glade Hadden	Archaeologist	Cultural

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The environmental assessment analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action have been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures result in a Finding of No Significant Impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

RATIONALE: This EA adequately analyzed the proposed action including reasonable alternatives and assessed the impacts of the proposed action. I do not believe that an EIS would provide any new data.

DECISION RECORD

DECISION: It is my decision to prepare and approve a Communication Site Management Plan for the Gobbler's Knob Communication Site.

This plan will be used by BLM officials administering communications uses at Gobbler's Knob, existing lessees, holders, and applicants desiring a lease, grant, or an amendment to an existing lease or right-of-way (ROW) grant. The Gobbler's Knob Communication Site Management Plan provides applicable guidance and adds current policy and technical standards for better management of the Gobbler's Knob Communications Site. The plan governs development and management of Gobbler's Knob and will be modified in the future as needs and conditions warrant. Any additional development of the site will be addressed in a site-specific NEPA document.

Additionally, the plan will make the operation and maintenance of the access road from County Road EE22 to the communication site the responsibility of each right-of-way or lease holder. Once a Site User's Association is established, they should direct the operation and maintenance of this road.

RATIONALE: Overall management direction for the administration of communications sites is outlined in the CFR and the BLM Handbook and applicable BLM Instructional Memoranda. Specific direction for site management planning on designated communications sites is contained in BLM Handbook 2860-1. Primary regulations and policy pertaining to issuance of communication site authorizations by the BLM are found in Title 43 CFR Sections 2801- 2806 and BLM Handbook 2860-1.

MITIGATION MEASURES: The preparation and approval a Communication Site Management Plan for the Gobbler's Knob Communication Site would require no mitigation. Any additional development of the site will be addressed in a site-specific NEPA document.

COMPLIANCE/MONITORING: BLM will monitor the communication site and conduct compliance examinations throughout the life of the project.

NAME OF PREPARER: /s/ Karen Montgomery

DATE: 9/6/2006

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: /s/ Bruce Krickbaum

DATE: 9/7/2006

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL: /s/ Barbara Sharrow

DATE: 9/14/2006